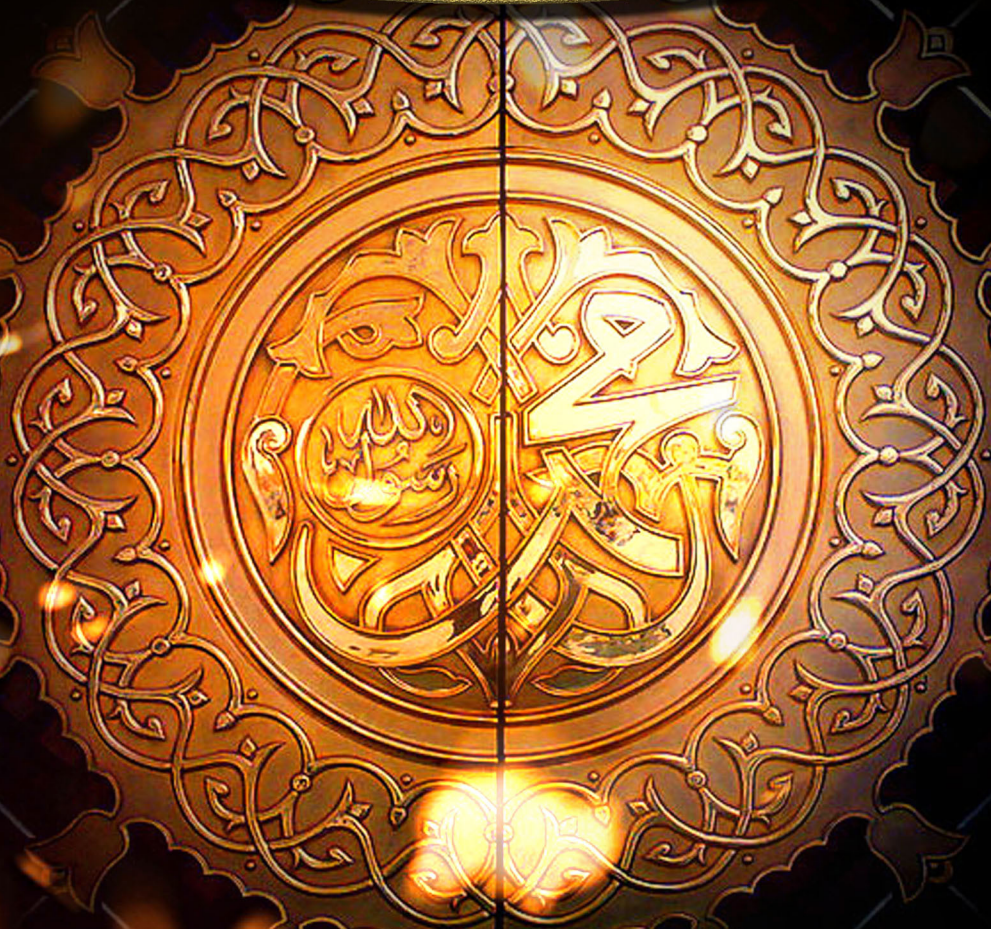


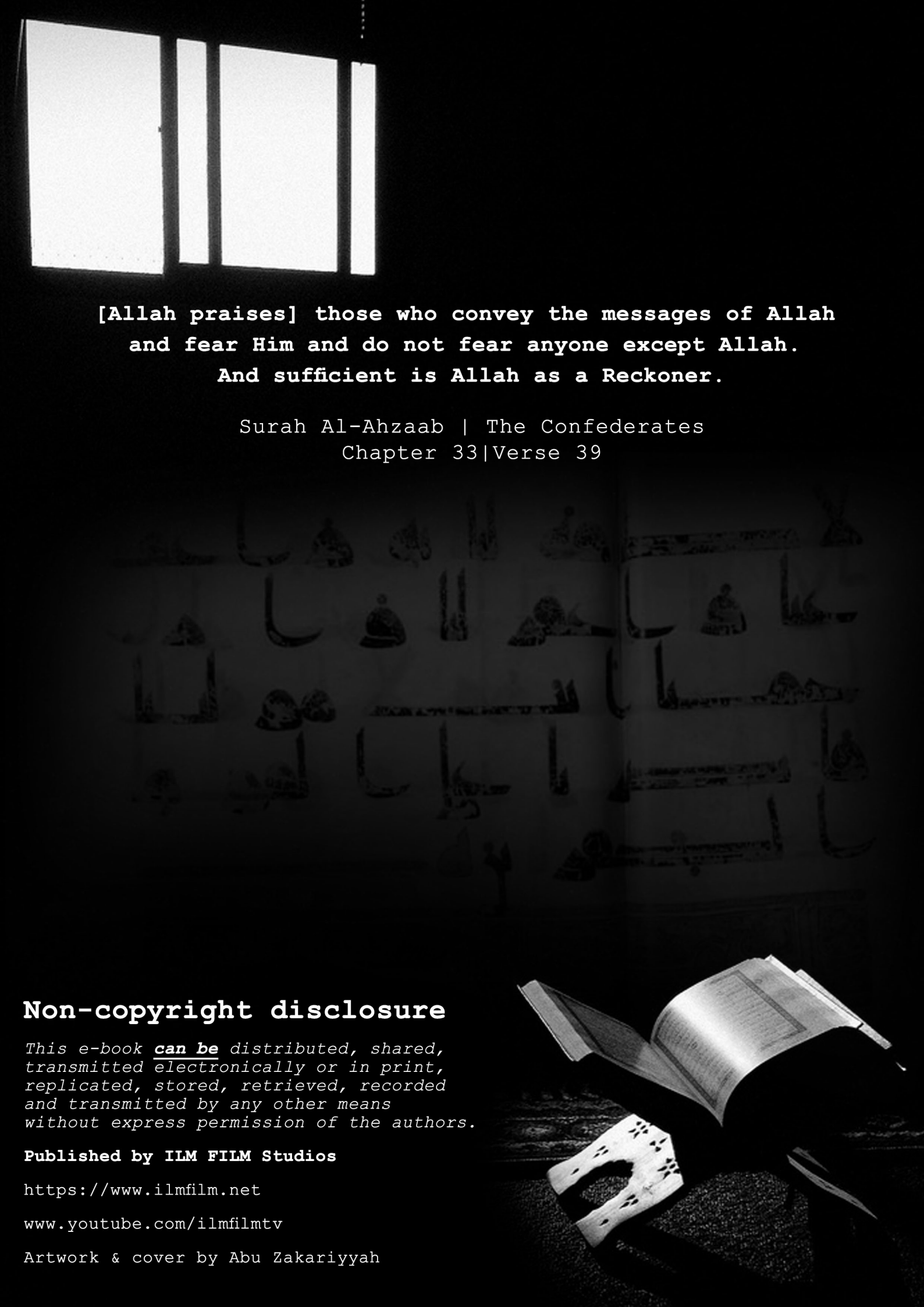


GREAT MUSLIM LIVES

VOLUME II



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[Allah praises] those who convey the messages of Allah
and fear Him and do not fear anyone except Allah.
And sufficient is Allah as a Reckoner.

Surah Al-Ahzaab | The Confederates
Chapter 33 | Verse 39

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Contents page

Foreword

Muhammad Nasir-ud-Din Al-Albani

(1914-1999), The Albanian

Hajja Zaynab Al-Ghazzali

(1917-2005), Unbroken

Samir Saleh Abdullah Al-Suwailem (Khattab)

(1969-2002), Pathways to Paradise

Sheikh Abdel-Hamid Kishk

(1933-1996), I Still Remember

Sheikh Hassan Muhammed al-Banna

(1906-1949), The Brotherhood

Bibliography, References and Further Reading

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Foreword

May the Peace and Salutations of Allah be upon our beloved Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم)
The Trustworthy, The Final Prophet and Messenger of Allah.

“Until the lion learns to speak, the tales of the hunter will be told”

They remind us of our defeat, our degradation and our deviation from the pathways of progress, piety and prosperity. In such times it may be difficult to draw inspiration and find courage in our identity as contemporary Muslims, however history reminds us that Islam has always been strengthened and supported by men and women of integrity, virtue and of exemplary accomplishments.

It is with a heart full of optimism, hope and love for Al-Islaam that we present to the reader a rich catalogue of contemporary biographies, each one recounting the life and legacy of a great Muslim personality.

Collectively, all of our subjects have demonstrated outstanding will and determination to cherish and champion the legacy and beauty of Al-Islaam in its purest form.

MUHAMMAD NASIR-UD-DĪN AL-ALBANI (1914–1999)

THE ALBANIAN

FROM THE ASHES

The turn of the twentieth century saw a general decline and the weakening of the once mighty Ottoman caliphate in Turkey, resulting from the ever increasing incursions and conquests by the British and other colonial forces into the Muslim lands.

The early 1900s were characterized by a sequence of cultural and material defeats for the Muslim world, many thinkers and academics foresaw the eventual collapse of the Islamic governing body and its inevitable subjugation to the British, French and Italian forces.

This reality was perhaps more apparent within the Eastern European frontiers of the Ottoman Caliphate, and it was in the midst of this critical and pivotal era of the Muslim Ummah, from within the Eastern European post of Albania that a young child was destined to be born.

It was Muhammad Nasiruddin bin Nuh Najaati bin Adaam al-Albani, who was later to be known to the world by his Nisbah *Al-Albani* and known to his students and his close associates by his Kunya, Abu Abdir-Rahmaan.

He was born in 1914 into a poor but learned religious family in the city of Ashkodëra, then the capital city of Albania where he spent the first nine years of his childhood.

Nasiruddin was the son of Albania's Grand Mufti, his father was a renowned scholar of the Hanafi tradition, he had spent several years in the Turkish Institute of Shariah before returning to Albania to assume the post of Grand Mufti.

But Albania, like many of the Eastern European regions of the time, was under the reign of secularist political parties with openly anti-religious agendas, the Albanian national leader was Ahmet Zugu, a staunch supporter and admirer of secularists such as Mustafa Kamal Attaturk of Turkey.

He even imitated Attaturk's policies and imported them into Albania by making it illegal to wear the hijab or banning the call to prayer in the Arabic language, instead he decreed that all calls to prayer should be made in the Bosnian language.

Nasiruddin Al-Albani's family decided to escape the encroaching influences of Zugu's secular philosophies and political agenda by making *Hijrah* (emigrating) to the Levant, also known as *Bilad-us-Shaam*.

The small community of migrants from Albania were religiously inclined families who were fleeing the region in order to safeguard their religious identity and the identity of their children, Al-Albani and members of his Albanian community who were also migrants to Syria were later to be known as the *Arnootiyy*, which was one of their indigenous names.



DAMASCAN DREAMS

In Damascus, Nasiruddin was blessed to have been in the midst of many eminent and learned scholars, the city was buzzing with ancient libraries and study circles, which was a world away from the situation back home in Albania. The young student was now in close proximity to the famous *Zahiriyyah* library, it would soon become a second home for the student of knowledge.

The young Nasiruddin Al-Albani received his first exposure to Islamic studies at the hands of his esteemed and capable father, a scholar in his own right. Under his father's tutelage the young Nasiruddin learnt and studied the rules of Tajwid (elocution), Arabic grammar and morphology as well as reading the canonical manuals of jurisprudence in the Hanafi school of thought – namely *Mukhtassar Al Qurduri* and other great scholarly works that his father was licensed to teach him, the young man was also enrolled into local seminaries which would enhance his knowledge and help him to further his studies under the tutelage of Syrian scholars.

But life as a migrant was tough on Nasiruddin and his family, so in order to support himself and to secure his future in the economy, he became an apprentice and took on the vocation of carpentry and horology, he would go on to master the art of horology and earn his living as a watch repairer.



THE GROWING PASSION

Contrary to what many adversaries and detractors have accused him of, Sheikh Nasiruddin Al Albani had studied with numerous reputable and recognized traditional scholars from Syria. He studied under Ash-Sheikh Muhammad Saeed Al-Burhani who taught him *Maraaqil Falaah*, a seminal hanafi manuscript, he also studied under Sheikh Allamah Bahjatul Baytar among many other notable scholars of Damascus.

The young Nasiruddin was very studious and intelligent, he occasionally recounted his youthful obsession with reading books of all genres, including popular titles as well as rare and obscure literary works. But his interest in the prophetic tradition and the science of hadith was sparked by the monumental work and publications of Sheikh Rashid Rida in his popular periodical magazine, *Al-Manar*.

Rashid Rida's critical analysis of Imam Al Ghazzali's phenomenal book *Ihya Ulum ul Deen* caused the young Nasiruddin to explore the field of hadith criticism in greater detail, so enthusiastic and captivated was the young student of knowledge that his life would eventually be consumed by the study and analysis of hadith.

BURNING BRIDGES, BUILDING FENCES

Now empowered with a new direction and enthusiastic to acquire as much knowledge of the science as possible, the young Nasiruddin Al Albani found himself in a predicament, he was too poor to purchase the manuscripts and stationary required for his new course of study, but that would not deter him in his pursuit of knowledge, instead – the young student would walk down the busy streets of Damascus collecting used invitation cards and pieces of paper from the side of the road. He used these discarded pieces of paper to write extensive notes wherever he found space to transcribe his newly found knowledge – this was also the early practice of the great Imam and scholar - Muhammad ibn Idrees Ash-Shafee'i, who was also stricken by childhood poverty, and obliged to collect scrap-paper outside the the Caliph's administrative offices, in order to take extensive study notes during his adolescence.

Nasiruddin Al Albani also rented books from the local libraries and by the age of seventeen years old – Nasiruddin had already compiled a three volume document with over two thousand pages on the topic of hadith criticism.



The young student soon became recognized in the study circles of Damascus and barely out of his teens he became sought after for answers to questions on hadith and the science of textual criticism.

However Nasiruddin soon ran into a stumbling block at home, when one of the books he wrote against the mystical and unorthodox practice of praying in graveyards reached his father's attention, Nasiruddin was soon kicked out of his home after supporting his point of view with various textual proofs and evidences while refusing to blindly follow his father's scholastic preference for the Hanafi school of thought.

But despite the intellectual drift between father and son, the twain were soon reunited and the young author regained his father's love and support, his father would even seek his council concerning the authenticity of certain narrations and traditions.

But the young man's knowledge was not acquired by reading books alone – he was perhaps an ardent and somewhat excessive reader but he was by no means an autodidact as many claim him to have been.

The young scholar did not extract his vast knowledge from the inanimate pages buried between the dusty covers of obscure books he found at the old library, but he pursued studies in the science of Hadith criticism under the guidance of notable scholars such as Al-Sheikh Muhammad Raagib At-Tabaakh of Halab who eventually awarded the young Nasiruddin with an *Ijaazah* (religious certificate of authorization) to teach and relate the traditions, but to Nasiruddin's own admission, the certificate of authority did not mean much to him.

He was in love with the science itself and found motivation in the research and study of hadith not in acquiring accolades and certificates.

INSIDE THE ZAHIRIYYAH LIBRARY

By the 1930s, Nasiruddin Al Albani began to specialize in the field of hadith studies, he was barely in his early twenties at the time, he transcribed and commented on Al-'Iraqi's monumental work *Al-Mughnee*. He followed this with a series of influential lectures and books as well as contributing articles in the *Al-Manar* magazine.

He spent much of his time in the Zahiriyyah Library of Damascus, he would make daily visits to the reading room. He spent between six to eight hours at a time reading through classical manuscripts and treaties but occasionally he would spend up to twelve hours in the library all the while copying text, researching rare scripts and reading through voluminous classics in solitude, only disrupting his studies to eat and pray – he often arrived before many of the librarians in the morning, and left after their late afternoon shift was done, it was due to his unusual study routine that he came under the attention of the librarians who eventually granted him his own isolated study room in the library where he soon became a part of the furniture.

It has been reported that as the years went by the sheikh continued to study ardently in the library room assigned to him, he read all the books then available and repeated the cycle upon completing his reading hoping to learn more and to pick up on subtle points he may have missed in his initial reading – he spend years working through classical manuscripts and rare titles, but the fruits of his labor were evident when he presented the librarians with a full catalogue of all the books in the library, he compiled a list and indexed all the manuscripts by author, topic and genre - he was even able to identify anonymous works that had been unidentified due to

poor referencing and a general lack of clarity in the text, he was able to do this by reading all the books in the library and correlating citations from books in the same library. By this effort he helped preserve many classical manuscripts and documents, in fact – some of the books present were not even known to the library management until the Sheikh pointed them out in his research.

These discoveries opened a treasure of scholastic works and helped a new generation of researchers and students of knowledge further their studies with the recovery of these priceless manuscripts.

In fact, so deep was the sheikh's love of literature and learning that it was once reported by Dr Mahmud Al-Meerah that he witnessed the day when Sheikh Al Albani climbed a ladder in the Zahiriyyah library and picked out a manuscript from the shelves, he immediately opened the book and was consumed by its content to the extent to which he stood on the ladder for six hours uninterrupted and unaware of the time that had passed him by.

Nasiruddin soon earned a reputation for his love of Hadith and his studious commitment to the pursuit of authentic knowledge, Sheikh Al Albani began delivering informal weekly lessons starting in the year 1954 and by the year 1960, his popularity began to alarm the Syrian secret services but despite Al Albani's apolitical stance, he was soon subjected to consistent surveillance operations.



CONTROVERSY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MADINAH

After a number of his works appeared in print, Sheikh Muhammad Nasiruddin Al Albani received a generous invitation to teach Hadith at the *Islamic University of Madinah*, the invitation was extended to him by the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia and the Chancellor of the university.

Sheikh Nasiruddin Al Albani became the founder and chief Lecturer at the *Hadith Faculty* in the *Islamic University of Madinah*, however this appointment was not long lived.

Unbeknown to many admirers and followers of Sheikh Nasiruddin Al Albani, there are reports that the Sheikh left the *University of Al Madinah* following his opposition to the view that the *Niqaab* – the face veil worn by Muslim women, was compulsory in Islam. Accordingly, he provided evidences from the hadith demonstrating the voluntary practice of wearing the face veil, he also supported his findings with various authentic texts and irrefutable evidences which he compiled in his book entitled *Jilbab Ul-Mar'at Il-Muslimah* (The Muslim woman's attire).

With this document he defended and substantiated his view – based on the Quran and the authenticated Hadith literature - that women are not obliged or compelled to cover their faces, however if they choose to do so, then it would be their personal decision, for which they would be rewarded by God – but the practice should not be imposed on women as a compulsory act of compliance, as was the general practice and the accepted norm in Saudi Arabia.

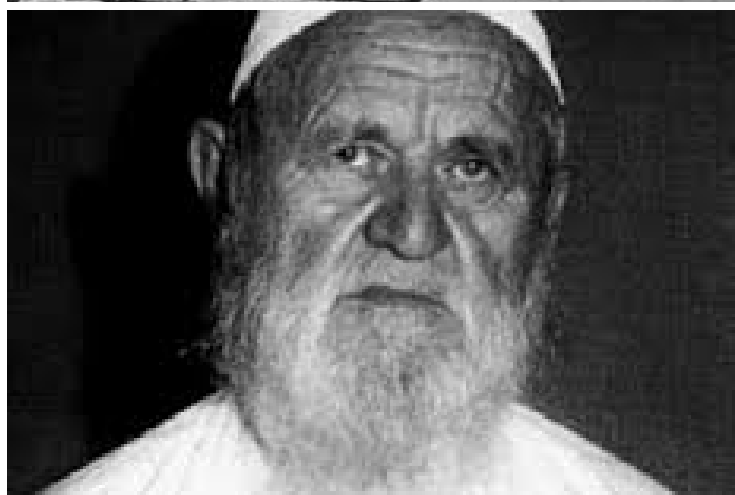
His courage and intellectual integrity shone through during this episode of brief disquiet at the university, although some scholars have also defended the opposing view, they still admired his knowledge and specialism in the field. More importantly, there were no personal attacks or attempts to defame the sheikh due to this disagreement.

Following this brief event, the Sheikh left Saudi Arabia after having served for only three years at the university, he subsequently returned to Damascus and resumed his work as a watch repairer.

TRAVELLING ENGAGEMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL WORK

Upon his return to Damascus, Sheikh Nasiruddin Al Albani continued his research and students flocked to his circles of knowledge, it is reported from reliable sources that the Sheikh would teach for up to six hours a day, one of his students was reputed to have even recorded six thousand lectures delivered by the Sheikh.

Sheikh Nasiruddin Al Albani visited various countries to deliver seminars and lectures – amongst them were Qatar, Egypt, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Spain and the United Kingdom. But for various reasons he was forced to emigrate a number of times, moving from Syria to Jordan, then back to Syria again, then to Beirut, then to the UAE, then again to Amman and back to Jordan.



JEALOUSY AND JAIL

Sheikh Muhammad Nasiruddin Al-Albani like all men of distinction was also a man who had many opponents and adversaries even from the scholarly class, this was best illustrated by the sad fact that some of his scholarly peers had joined forces in order to report him to the grand Mufti of Syria on the premise that he was preaching a seditious and subversive puritanical dogma – the mufti escalated the matter and reported it to the Director in charge of security matters who later summoned Sheikh Al-Albani for a serious discussion. Following the meeting it was discovered that the complaint was baseless and the Shaikh was free to go, but the damage was already done and his movements were now being monitored.

Yet despite Al Albani's apolitical nature, he was still persecuted several times by the Syrian regime. In 1969, Sheikh Muhammad Nasiruddin Al Albani was seized by Syrian government authorities in a mass crackdown on many Sunni clerics, he subsequently spent a brief time in prison before they were all released.

Meanwhile, Sheikh 'Abdul 'Azeez bin AbdullAh bin Baz's intervened with the Saudi educational management and persuaded them to received Sheikh Al Albani a second time so that he may serve as the head of higher education in Islamic law in Mecca.

This second term of employment lasted even less time than his first post at the *University of Al Madinah*, some have cited reports of differences between the sheikh and the Saudi establishment, so he returned to Syria where he was jailed a second time during the year 1979, following his release he decided to make hijrah to Jordan where he eventually settled.



INFLUENCE, CAREER AND COMPANIONSHIP

Over a period of sixty years, Sheikh Al Albani's lectures and publications were highly influential in the field of Islamic studies and many of his works became reference points for other Islamic scholars, yet he supported himself and his family by fixing watches in his modest workshop, he used to work for three hours daily except for Tuesdays and Fridays.

The late Sheikh also maintained mutual relations with his fellow contemporaries in the field of Islamic sciences, he was a dear friend and comrade of the eminent Saudi cleric Sheikh 'Abdul 'Azeez bin Baz in a friendship that lasted for forty years, wherein both men spoke highly of one another.

DEATH OF A SCHOLAR, LOSS OF A NATION

He died on Saturday October the 2nd in the year 1999, following the afternoon 'Asr prayers, he was then aged 88 years old, it was in the same year when he won the *King Faisal International Prize* for his contributions to scholarship in Islamic studies.

Sheikh Muhammad Nasiruddin Al Albani's body was buried in Al-Hamlan graveyard, a walking distance from his home, it is reported that over five thousand mourners attended his funeral prayers that day. Sheikh Muhammad Nasiruddin Al Albani was the author of hundreds books some of which exceeded a total of over forty volumes each, his call for a revision to the old way of thinking lasted many decades, he lectured, wrote articles, authored books, taught at prestigious universities and influenced an entire generation of brilliant scholars and legal theorists.

Above all, he challenged the scholarly establishment to review and re-engage with the classical texts with a renewed zeal and sense of urgency, he provided a new spring of rejuvenation to the science and discipline of hadith studies, one that was slowly fossilizing and stagnating as more academics were only willing to view the text with a passive eye rather than with the critical eye and the analytical approach that was befitting and wholly necessary for the advancement and re-awakened effort to reclaim and re-establish the lofty principles and truths conveyed by the authentic traditions.

May Allah grant Sheikh Nasiruddin Al Albani a great reward for his contributions and pardon us all for our errors and short-comings.

- Ameen

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PAL

HAJJA ZAYNAB AL-GHAZZALI (1917–2005)

UNBROKEN

EGYPTIAN GOLD

Hajjah Zainab Al Ghazzali was born on January the 2nd in the year 1917.

The young Zainab grew up and blossomed under the loving care of her father, an enlightened man who had received his formal training and education at the prestigious Islamic university of Al Azhar in Cairo. Zainab's father earned a modest income by operating in the cotton trade industry of Egypt and he supplemented that income by also serving as a religious instructor.

HER FATHER'S GLORY

Zainab is an old Arabic name which can be loosely translated as “her father's glory”, it is the Arabic equivalent of the Greek name “Cleopatra”, but more importantly, Zainab's illustrious namesake was none other than Zainab bint Muhammad – who was the first child and the eldest daughter of the Prophet Muhammad (Salallahu 'aleihi wa Sallam).

Like her namesake, Zainab Al Ghazzali was crowned in her father's love and blessed by his paternal gifts of encouragement and affection.

At an early age, Zainab Al Ghazzali's father would tell his daughters about the great Muslim heroines of old, he even encouraged his daughter to become a champion of the religion and a leader amongst believers – her role models were the shining examples amongst men and women believers of the early Muslim generations – including notable female companions such as the courageous female warrior Nusayba bint Ka'b al-Muzaniyyah – who was a female companion of the Prophet Muhammad (Salallahu 'aleihi wa Sallam) as well as an experienced and established veteran who had served in many battles and expeditions in the army of the Prophet (Salallahu 'aleihi wa Sallam), including the famous Battle of Uhud.



THE MUSLIM MOTHERHOOD

True to the spirit of leadership and courage that her father had planted into the heart and mind of the young Zainab, the young woman grew up to challenge and question the role of women in Egyptian society.

This intellectual enquiry would for a short time during her teenage years result in her exploration and subsequent enrolment into the fold of feminist ideology – thus for a period of time during her formative years as a teenager she supported and enrolled herself into the ranks of Egypt's Feminist Union, however this adventure was short lived and was abruptly discontinued when Zainab discovered a far more empowering and liberating cause for the Muslim woman in society, when she discovered the rights and responsibilities granted to women in the religion of Islam itself.

Soon after making this realization she renounced her membership and support for the Egyptian feminist union and concluded that episode by with the following conclusion;

“Islam gave women rights in the family granted by no other society”

By the age of 18 years old – Zainab Al Ghazzali was already planting the seeds of revival and religious re-awakening in the hearts and minds of the Muslim youth in Egypt, she cemented this effort by organizing and running the *Jamaat al-Sayyidat al-Muslimat* - The Muslim ladies Association.

The organization was reported to have a national membership register of around three million Muslim women up until it was forcefully disbanded by the Egyptian government in the year 1964.



DAUGHTERS OF THE NILE

Egypt was not short of exceptionally gifted and charismatic matriarchs, from the ancient rule of queen Nefertiti to the flamboyant kingdom of Cleopatra and the scientific and cultural achievements of Egyptian women such as Sameera Moussa and Umm Kulthum, the Egyptian psyche has long been awakened and attentive to the power and influence of feminine will and determination. Hajjah Zainab Al Ghazzali was the latest personification of that legacy.

Hajjah Zainab occupied two spheres of life, one that was anchored in the home and domestic obligations to her husband and the family unit, and another that was cemented within the heart of society as a guide, a voice and a spring of hope for millions of women just like her.

It has been reported by reliable sources that Hajjah Zainab used to organize and deliver weekly lectures and study circles exclusively for female audiences at the Ibn Tulun Masjid in Cairo, the masjid is perhaps one of the oldest mosques in the city and is counted amongst the largest and most respected buildings in the vicinity. It was within this establishment that Zainab Al Ghazzali would address her students and audiences of up to three thousand people - on a weekly basis. Attendance could often exceed four thousand on religious occasions and during the month of Ramadan.

Hajjah Zainab drew such crowds to these seminars and study circles by delivering educational, social reform and development programs that not only provided avenues for literacy and numeracy but also promoted and implemented projects that included the establishment and maintenance of orphanages, the publications of magazines and journals, practical assistance for impoverished households and mediation services for family disputes.

At its most advanced and strategic levels, the Muslim Women's association also mobilized its resources to bring the political establishment to account for its short-comings and its deficiency in establishing the full and proper legal mandates prescribed by the Noble Quran.

In fact, Hajjah Zainab was so confident and dedicated to her social struggle to revive and establish women's rights by promoting the true Quranic message and by educating women in the understanding and appreciation of the Prophetic message of Islam – that upon her marriage to her husband Al hajj Salim Salim, the young bride put a conditional clause to the validity of their marriage, she demanded the following terms agreement.

“If that day comes in which a clash is apparent between your personal interests and economic activities on the one hand - and my Islamic work on the other, and that I find my married life is standing in the way of Da’wah and the establishment of an Islamic governing body, then, each of us should go our own way.

I cannot ask you today to share with me this struggle, but it is my right on you not to stop me from my struggle in the way of God.

Moreover, you should not ask me about my activities with other activists, and let trust be full between us. A full trust between a man and a woman, a woman who - at the age of 18 gave her full life to God and to the Da’wah. In the event of any clash between the marriage contract’s interest and that of the Da’wah, our marriage will end - but Da’wah will always remain rooted in me. (al Ghazali 2006)”



TURBULENT TIMES

But if Hajjah Zainab's determination was resolute and unwavering, then it was only matched by the political regime's iron will and firm intent to crush and crack down on any dissenting voices from the masses.

During Zainab Al Ghazzali's lifetime, Egypt had experienced turbulent times in her political agenda and constitution. It was in the year 1952 that a group of revolutionaries planned to overthrow the Egyptian monarchy led by King Farouk. This plot was championed by a young officer in his mid-thirties named Gamal Abdul Nasser, who went on to be elected as deputy prime minister once the old establishment was overtaken and replaced by a new Egyptian government.

By 1953, Gamal Abdul Nasser initiated several land reforms and other laws governing property and civil conduct in Egypt, some of these new laws provoked and incited several organizations who opposed such measures, amongst these objectivists were some factions of the *Muslim Brotherhood*, who during a 1954 general meeting in Alexandria made an attempt to take Gamal Abdul Nasser's life.

The assassin was apprehended and the intended murder was prevented, however resulting from this terrible conspiracy and violent resolution came the severe reprisal of Gamal Abdul Nasser and his forces.

The *Muslim brotherhood* and many other religious groups were thus subject to a nationwide ban and crackdown.

By June 1956 a public referendum approved a new constitution and the appointment of Gamal Abdul Nasser for the post of presidency, from there on – the suppression of Islamic dissidents and groups would be intensified to severe proportions.



INDEPENDENT CHOICES

Initially, the Nasserite government did not target the *Muslim Women's Association* as it was not under the authority of the *Muslim brotherhood* or any such Islamic movements – in fact, Zainab Al Ghazzali had previously received invitations to join forces and merge with the *Muslim brotherhood* by none other than Sheikh Hassan Al Banna, the founder and lead ideologue of the movement, however – true to the spirit of courage and self-determination, Zainab Al Ghazzali refused the offer and preferred to operate with full autonomy and authority as far as the course and direction of her organisation was concerned.

It was for that reason that Zainab Al Ghazzali and her organisation did not come under the government's radar during the early years of suppression and in president Nasser's crackdown on Islamic dissidents - however that was soon to change.

SIGN ON THE DOTTED LINE

On a winter day in February 1964, Hajjah Zainab was travelling by car when her journey was abruptly disrupted by a sharp and violent collision with another vehicle, the force with which her vehicle had been hit was enough to send her car rolling over itself, she soon lost consciousness and eventually woke up in a hospital room in Heliopolis, surrounded by her husband, colleagues and close family members – she was totally unaware as to the course of events that had resulted in her present condition.

Hajjah Zainab was transferred to another hospital where she had to undergo heavy surgery in her thigh bone, upon regaining consciousness she began to hear of rumors that the accident was far less accidental than initially thought, reports were coming in that it was an assassination attempt by one of president Nasser's secret agents.

These suspicions became more certain when shortly after the incident, documents delivered by her secretary revealed that president Nasser had ordered the complete closure of the *Muslim Women's association's* headquarters – Hajjah Zainab received the shattering news while she was still in hospital.

But president Nasser's strategy would not be satisfied by the mere discontinuation of the *Muslim Woman's Association*, he had dispatched a document to Zainab Al Ghazzali requesting that she signed up for membership to join the *Arab Socialist Union* – to her great surprise and utmost disapproval, Zainab Al Ghazzali refused to sign the papers despite pleas from her secretary to do so in order to avoid further conflict with president Nasser.



In the weeks and months to follow, Zainab Al Ghazzali received several personal visits from her secretary who would at times inform her that the decision to dissolve the *Muslim Women's Association* had been lifted or suspended in favor of negotiations and compromises between president Nasser and Hajjah Zainab, it would appear that the president considered a softer approach to winning her over to his side, however Zainab Al Ghazzali was firm and resolute that she would not agree to join the *Arab Socialist Union* under any circumstance.

When these subtle cues were rebuffed and rejected, the Nasserite regime began to employ more direct means of persuasion, these included sending Socialist membership cards to Zainab Al Ghazzali's residence, followed by the unwarranted invitations to socialist meetings and gatherings, eventually this form of passive aggressive intimidation culminated in a phone call directed to Hajjah Zainab – when she picked the phone up, she was addressed by an officer within the socialist party who was emphatically suggesting that she and all the members of the *Muslim Women's Association* should prepare banners and head for the airport to welcome and congratulate president Nasser on his return home. The officer even offered to arrange private transportation to the airport to mark the occasion.

A few days following the unwanted invite, Zainab Al Ghazzali received another phone call from the *Arab Socialist Union*, this time it was a female agent who called to enquire as to why the *Muslim Women's association* was absent at the president's welcoming parade – to this, Hajjah Zainab politely explained that she and her organisation had no intention or interest in gathering for such events as it was not Islamically appropriate or congruent with the command of God and His Messenger – she then explained that she was incapacitated and unable to travel due to her medical condition, the conversation ended there.

A week later, her secretary presented an official mandate stating that the *Muslim Women's Association* was officially banned and no longer allowed to operate. The case was finally closed, but the negotiations were far from conclusive.

Following the closure of the women's organisation, president Nasser extended several offers including money and position within the *Arab Socialist Union* on the condition that Hajjah Zainab would agree to cooperate and be loyal to his cause – she refused each and every one of these offers, despite the huge sums of money at stake and the envious positions of leadership within the establishment.



THE ARRIVAL

By 1965, several activists and leaders from dissident factions and other Islamic organizations were being arrested and jailed, these even included an elderly woman, 85 years of age – who went by the name Umm Ahmad.

On Friday August 20th 1965, Zainab Al Ghazzali's time had finally come, president Nasser dispatched several officer to Hajjah Zainab's residence early in the morning without a warrant or any legal basis for the subsequent arrest.

The officers ransacked the entire house, tearing down and smashing the decorations and anything that stood in their way, they also seized a young nephew of Hajjah Zainab and took him away, the agents returned to the home and took the contents of the family's wealth that had been carefully kept in a safe, they also confiscated religious manuscripts that had been published over a century ago, finally – the officers seized Hajjah Zainab and threw her into the back of their military van.

When the van reached the military detention camps, Hajjah Zainab was confronted by the chief prosecutor who went into a rage and began to shout gross abuse and threatened to have her buried, these were terrible words, but her hour of tribulation was yet to commence.

As she stood before the two military officers, now trembling in fear – she could hear the call to prayer from the nearby masjid, Hajjah Zainab offered *Salatul Khawf* (a prayer performed in a state of fear and apprehension) while she stood before the officers, praying that they would not notice her subtle gestures and lip movements as she prayed standing up.



INSIDE ROOM 24

The military detention center in which Zainab Al Ghazzali was to spend several years - faced with daily torture, threats of rape and hard labor – held a horrific surprise that lay await for her as she was slowly being taken to her cell. On her way there she witnessed the torture and severe pain inflicted on fellow inmates, some had been flogged severely while others were hung from the ceiling, yet as she passed them by she reminded them to be patient and to have faith in the promise of God. For these words she would suffer painful blows to the head and to the back, yet she took every opportunity to raise her voice in defiance.

Tired and brutalized, she finally reached the door to room 24, the door was opened and she was violently flung inside – what happened next is not for the faint of heart.

UNBROKEN

“In the Name of Allah, Peace be upon you”

These were the first words she uttered when she entered room 24, it was pitch black and drowning in darkness, but the moment the door was locked and escape was no longer an option – the lights were switched on and Hajjah Zainab was confronted by a host of ferocious and terrifying creatures.

The room was full of dogs, at first sight it was not even possible to count how many dogs filled the room but there was little time for such considerations, almost immediately these snarling beasts attacked their prey and mercilessly tore her flesh, digging their teeth into her scalp, biting her back and tearing away at her chest and shoulders, the pain must have been indescribable but the only words that escaped her lips were *“Allah, Allah”*.

Eyes closed, the painful episode felt like hours but eventually the prison door was opened and the ravenous beasts were torn away from her weak and lacerated body. Now almost certain of her imminent death, Zainab Al Ghazzali opened her eyes to what she anticipated would be a pool of blood and flesh but to her absolute surprise and astonishment - there was not a single tear mark on her clothes and not a drop of blood had been drawn from her body, she doubted herself for a while - unsure as to whether she deserved such miraculous help.

However, her troubles were only beginning, she was then escorted out of room 24 and moved into another prison cell. From her new location, Zainab Al Ghazzali could see the other prisoners as they were flogged and tortured in the court yard, the sight was awful but it was made worse by the fact that the prisoners were forced to curse Zainab's name or face further punishment, some of them refused while others relented to the torture and uttered the foul words that they were forced to repeat.



THE DREAM

It was in this condition that Zainab Al Ghazzali retreated into the darkness of her prison cell and suddenly felt the strong urge to sleep, she dozed off as words of remembrance and praise of God escaped her lips. She goes on to recount how this was to be the first of four apparitions and dreams that she had of the Prophet Muhammad (Salallahu 'aleihi wa Sallam) during her captivity in the military camp.

During her long prison sentence, Hajjah Zainab Al Ghazzali suffered inhumane and severe punishment on a daily basis, from being hanged by her legs to merciless and blood inducing flogging, to attempted rape and mutilation – yet her faith never weakened and she continued to refuse any form of compromise or agreement to join the socialist union of president Nasser, all of which only resulted in more severe punishment and a longer prison term.

RELEASE AND PARDON

It was following president Nasser's death and Awar Saddat's election to the presidential office that Hajjah Zainab Al Ghazzali was finally pardoned and subsequently freed in 1971.

Soon after her release from prison, Hajjah Zainab started to teach again and began writing books and articles, she became an editor of a women and children's section in *Al-Da'wah magazine* - in which she encouraged women to become educated, she also wrote her memoirs recounting her time in jail, the book was written under the title of *Ayyām min hayātī (Days of my life)*, this book was also published in English under the title

"Return of the Pharaoh"

The Pharaoh she writes about, was president Nasser - and throughout her book she recounts and details the inhumane and wicked treatment she was subject to while in captivity, she celebrates her faith in God and recounts a number of auspicious dreams of the Prophet Muhammad (SalallAhu 'aleihi wa Sallam) that helped her strengthen her resolve and maintain her sanity despite the unspeakable horrors she had endured on a daily basis.



DEATH AND LEGACY

Hajjah Zainab Al Ghazzali was an activist, a champion for women's rights and education but more importantly, she was a firm believer.

She died on August the 3rd 2005, at the age of 88 having endured trials and tribulations that most men could not endure for a single hour, she left behind a legacy as bright as the sun - one that shines bright in the constellation of outstanding Muslim lives and legacies.

We pray that Allah grant's Hajjah Zainab Al Ghazzali a most welcome entrance into the high palaces of Paradise and unites her with the angelic hosts and the souls of the righteous women who died for their faith, such as Aasia & Summayah.



GREAT MUSLIM LIVES



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SAMIR SALEH ABDULLAH AL-SUWAILEM (1969–2002)

PATHWAYS TO PARADISE

A LEADER IS BORN

Khattab. The fearless freedom fighter, the gentle general, the noble knight of Islam. He entered the world as ordinary souls do, bearing the gift of two eyes, two legs and a heart of gold.

His parents named him Samir Saleh Abdullah Al-Suwailem, this was indeed a beautiful gift from God. From his birth, he was wrapped in the love and admiration of both his parents. Born on the 26th of Muharam in the year 1389 A.H which coincides with April 14th in the year 1969. He was reported to have been born in the city of Araar, in the Northern region of Saudi Arabia.



MOUNTAINS AND MEN

Samir, who would later be known by his *Nom-de-guerre* “*Khattab*” grew to become an intelligent, sensitive and sensible boy who had taken to serious studies while still in elementary school. He studied for a number of years at the Madrassa of Umar Ibn Khattab, in Saudi Arabia.

During the weekend breaks, his father would take Samir and his brothers to the mountainous regions up where the world could be seen in the light the splendid sun, far away from the polluted clouds of dust of the inner city. Up on the mountains, from where the birds of heaven could be heard in the wind - far away from the hustle and bustle of the crowded city streets. Up on the mountain is where Gabriel (‘Aleihi Salaam) met Prophet Muhammad (Salallahu ‘aleihi wa Sallam), where Prophet Moses (‘Aleihi Salaam) spoke to God (SubhanaHu wa Ta’alaa) and where heaven meets earth.

The mountainous regions is where Khattab and his brothers would contemplate the beautiful creation of God. It was in fact in that natural environment that khattab’s father would instruct his sons and educate them on various survival techniques that would serve to strengthen their spirits and to instill bravery and resilience in their young and tender souls.

FALLING PETALS, RISING FEARS

But like all adolescents pure and untainted by the harsh realities of existence. Khattab nurtured very high ambitions for his future life, he would express his desire to pursue academic studies in the USA where he intended to study for a Phd aiming to become a medical professional who would one day use his knowledge and experience to save lives.

Even in these childhood ambitions, his humanitarian inclinations and his kind hearted personality shone through with a piercing clarity.

Yet it was during these formative years as an exemplary student in his homeland that Khattab's youthful ambitions and innocent dreams were being stripped apart by the sharp claws of reality.

Khattab, like millions of children all over the world, grew up like a delicate rose polluted by the poisonous and menacing spectacle of endless war and devastating conflicts. A rose like too many others, deflowered of dreams and uprooted from childhood innocence in a world seemingly full of injustice and burdened by senseless violence.

Still, as these wars continued to grow and spread like a cancer in the Muslim world, none was as close to his heart nor as disturbing to his mind as the continuous screams that were reaching the innermost confines of his conscience heart. Broken screams from distant villages and civilian enclaves of Afghanistan, all during the soviet invasion.

Khattab, like millions of conscientious human beings from around the world, would agonize over the daily reports of violent assaults, brutal rapes and the ruthless murder which the innocent civilians of Afghanistan were being dealt with by one of the most powerful military forces known to the contemporary world.

Reports were being brought back of innocent men and women who were being crushed to death by tanks. This somber affair was accentuated by the ongoing oppression and the transgressions against the Palestine people. It was in fact during this period in Khattab's adolescence, that he and many others came to hear of the first Palestinian *Intifada*.

Moved, shaken and disturbed by the sight of millions of refugees flooding the borders between Afghanistan and Pakistan -



- at the youthful age of eighteen years old, Khattab had decided to ransom his extraordinary dreams and ambitions in order to help others rebuild their ordinary lives and to re-establish basic human rights, in their ancestral homeland.

Khattab was an exceptionally sensible youth, one who possessed all the means but took none of the excuses to pursue his worldly ambitions while snubbing the glaring injustices that were visited on the weak and helpless human beings elsewhere in the Muslim world.

This selfless reproach and genuine concern for the innocent children, women and elderly people in Afghanistan gave birth to Khattab's noble and courageous decision to embark on the path once taken by men of greatness, men hailing from all cultures and civilization, those peaceful yet profound spirits that were compelled to march forth in times of need so as to carry forwards the torch of justice and liberation.

Striving in support of the weak and of the oppressed, to repel the heavy hand of war and to struggle earnestly against the unbearable triple tyrannies of death, destruction and degradation.

THE AFGHAN WAR

At the age of eighteen years old, Khattab left Saudi Arabia to participate in the humanitarian struggle against the violent subjugation of the local communities during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan between the years 1988 and 1994. Yet despite his comfortable and passive upbringing, Khattab was soon confronted with the harsh and inhumane realities of war and conflict.

During his first few weeks in Afghanistan (where the United States and other Western players had been instrumental in arming, financing and training the Mujahideen to expel the Russian forces and to restore anti-socialist rule in the region) Khattab was noted for his sharp intellect and his rapid progress through the ranks. It was during this time that he suffered several battle wounds and subsequently lost his fingers and the ability to use his right hand.

Yet despite his personal losses and the sacrifices he had made, Khattab never lost his humanity and he remained as selfless and generous as he had always been even before the war had started. He was remembered, for his generous and kind actions towards his brethren in Faith.

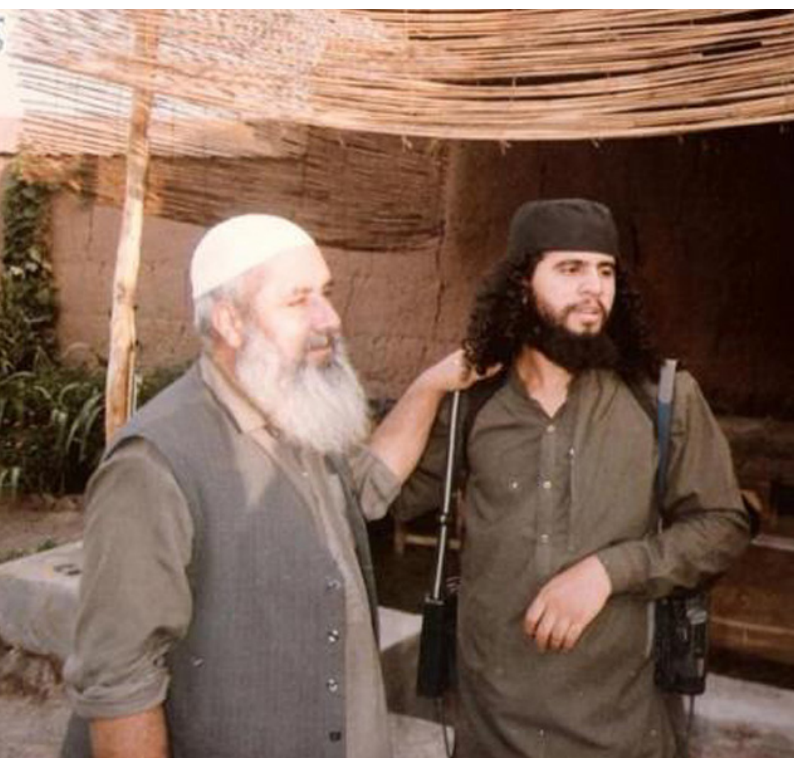
His bravery knew no bound and his courage was legendary on the field. Khattab had escaped the clutches of death on a number of occasions, yet each time he expressed his unshakable faith in God by stating that his time had not yet arrived and that it was not written for him to die under those circumstances.

It was not long before his courage, dedication and hard work had come under the weary eyes of the secret services from behind the enemy lines.

Despite several attempts from his family to lure him back to the safety and comfort of his life back home, the spirit of Khattab remained firm and steadfast on this path and he continued his support of the weak and championed justice even to the farthest corners of the Muslim world.

No heat, inconvenience or threat of death could deter this young lion from marching forth into the light of justice.

Soon, the Russian army would be defeated and forced to leave Afghanistan. The battle was over and for most of the liberating forces it was time to go home, but this victory only marked the beginning of a life-long commitment for the young commander, Khattab.



TAJIKISTAN

Following Russia's defeat in Afghanistan, Khattab and a dozen freedom fighters were alerted to the ongoing conflict in a neighboring country where Russian forces were still present.

With the intent to support and liberate the small community of Muslims in Tajikistan - those poor souls who had been neglected due to the attention being diverted to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Khattab felt the pain and the agony of this forgotten community, therefore he travelled there under great duress and difficulty owing to the underdeveloped roads and infrastructure as well as the limited human and financial resources then available.

Nevertheless, driven by his unshakable determination and his firm courage, the young commander answered the call of the oppressed communities in Tajikistan and spent an entire year there training the locals in self-defense techniques and helping them make preparations in order to repel the brutal attacks from the enemy forces.



FIRST CHECHEN WAR BEGINS

In February 1995, Khattab began conducting a careful research on the conditions of the Muslims living in a very isolated and neglected part of the Caucasus region. They occupied a very small and ambiguous republic known as Chechnya.

Initially, Khattab was not convinced that his men could make any positive contributions in the region. It was then occupied and came under the attack of the Russians for many a generation, the local population were abandoned by the world community and there was very little hope of making any lasting impact in the region, with just a dozen or so young men.

For any ordinary commander, this would have been the choice of least consideration - but not for Khattab. He was a conscientious and soft hearted young man who did not count the enemy's tanks but counted the tears, of the orphans and widows. He feared not the mortars and missiles that destroyed entire communities but he feared the cries of the oppressed and the supplications of the old and the weak who had been simply abandoned with neither help nor support.



Khattab was not motivated by senseless anger nor moved by violent zeal. Even back home, he was not known for any criminal activities, to the contrary - everything he did was motivated by his love of Islam and the Muslims as well as his deep desire to remove injustice and aggression from the land - no matter who the perpetrator was. Ultimately, it was the touching words of an elderly Chechen woman that solidified his resolve to participate in the Chechen liberation struggle.

Following his resolve to defend the lives, honor and rights of the weak and oppressed Chechen people. Khattab began to train young locals and volunteers within the small villages by providing military training and guidance. Within a few months the battalions were successful in repelling and retaliating against the elite Russian armed forces that had encroached into the region and were continuously launching attacks on the local villages and terrorising the peaceful rural communities.

It was on October the 10th in the year 1995 that the Russian forces were effectively expelled from the mountainous regions of Vedeno by a small band of young freedom fighters. When news of this unlikely victory began to spread amongst the tribes and habitations, more volunteers joined the struggle for freedom and Khattab continued to encourage and strengthen their development.



STRENGTH THROUGH EDUCATION

In a rare interview, Khattab said that his only aim was to help liberate fellow Muslims from Russian rule. Since his arrival in the Caucasus in the mid 1990s - he had trained scores of young fighters in military manoeuvres and self-defense strategies.

Above all other considerations, Khattab's main objective was to rekindle the light of Islam in a land that had for many years been subjugated to the godless tenets and influence of Communism.

Khattab not only used the sword of truth against the tyrannical forces, but he also made equal use of the pen to liberate the hearts and illuminate the minds. Khattab followed the Prophetic example by educating and reconstructing local communities following the horrors of war and violence.

Soon after the withdrawal of Russian troops from the region, Khattab immediately began to develop a program for educational and social reform to help the youth regain their morale and to instill a strong Islamic identity in the coming generation.

During his time in Chechnya, Khattab had touched the hearts of the locals and earned the respect of the president elect, Zaleem Khan.

He was known for his soft and tender words towards the weak and dispossessed - he would at times buy cattle for the orphans and their caretakers, Khattab was noted for his immense appeal with the masses, taking special care of those fighters who not only suffered from the oppression of the Russian forces, but who also suffered from abject poverty.

Unlike the military leaders that ravage and oppress the people they are supposed to liberate, Khattab lived amongst the people and mingled with them.

He shared their sorrows at times of hardship and participated in their celebrations in times of happiness. His genuine concern and care for a people who were all but forgotten to the rest of humanity only demonstrates his deep empathy with the oppressed no matter who they were or how large the ranks of the oppressor was.

Khattab learnt the local language and became fluent in the dialect of the people. He even married a woman from the local tribe and fathered three beautiful children with her. With his charm, his pious lifestyle and his awesome leadership abilities, Khattab was accepted by all the community and became like their very own son.

RUSSIAN ROULETTE

Despite the unilateral military agreements and promises from the withdrawing Russian army - stating that civilians would be permitted to live a peaceful and unhindered life and that no military or financial provocation would be initiated after their safe withdrawal from the Chechen territories, the Russian army failed to keep their part of the promise and their plans to continue their military expedition in the region were soon to transpire.

It was not long after this that the Russian forces would reassembled their ranks and prepare for a second assault against the Chechen republic despite the peace treaties signed and honored by the Muslim forces.

The Russian forces invaded the region with a new resolve to crush any attempt for independence and thus a second war was initiated.

The enemy forces shattered the dreams and peaceful aspirations of the local villagers by encroaching on their land and destroying their livelihoods. The army bombed and burnt villages, shot and shattered the ordinary lives of innocent souls, destroying the lives of a people unprovoked and unconcerned.

They had in fact made use of and exploited the peace treaty following the first Chechen war in order to consolidate their forces and prepare their army for a second wave of violence, terror and destruction.

Peace was never their long term objective, they simply had taken advantage of Khattab's peaceful resolution and humanitarian objectives to withdraw their troops unharmed and unmolested after their first defeat, but now they would return to avenge their losses and to terminate any remnants of the Chechen resistance.



A PREMONITION

According to an interview by the Arabic news agency *Al-Wassat*, in an article published in issue 538 on May 26th 2002, Khattab's mother explains that prior to his birth she had seen an auspicious dream in which groups of men and women gathered around a large basin of water that stretched as far as the eye can see, they raised their hands and made supplications to God. Their eyes were gazing towards the sky as they awaited the emergence of the moon.

They looked like those who come for Hajj from the Caucasus region, she recalls having promised his father in the dream that God would grant them a child, one who would have a wide reputation, an agile body and strength.

Upon waking up from the dream, she decided not to tell anyone about the vision. She kept it a secret for several decades until she eventually saw her son becoming a leader and a general for the people in Chechnya.

Khattab was young but possessed a sharp mind and was used to contemplating deeply upon the reality of the world. He sacrificed the life and ambition of his peers to pursue a life of service unto the Muslim Ummah.



RETURNING HOME

After fifteen long years of tireless sacrifice, selfless struggle and sincere efforts to defend and preserve the lives, honor and property of the impoverished and downtrodden Muslim people of Afghanistan and Chechnya. Khattab's life was drawing close to an end.

Only 32 years of age, he had already suffered from several wounds. He had lost fingers on his right hand and had been rumored to have been killed on 10 separate occasions within the space of 5 years.

Ibragim Alauri, a Dagestani postal courier turned double agent who worked for the Russians - had been posing as a close friend of Khattab and served as his personal assistant. But in 2002, Ibragim was sent by the secret services on a deadly assignment to kill his own brother and fellow Muslim.

The would-be assassin was given a poisoned letter, supposedly from the mother of Khattab addressed to her son, this was in fact an act of treachery. One that would result in the assassination of a respected and beloved leader and freedom fighter.

Chechen sources revealed that the letter was coated with a fast-acting nerve agent. It was also reported that the operation to recruit the double agent took six months and required very careful preparations.

On the night of March 19th in the year 2002, when the letter was finally delivered to the unsuspecting victim, Khattab went into his tent to read the supposed letter from his dear mother. He emerged from the tent half an hour later with a very pale face which he was rubbing with the stump of his arm.

An hour later Khattab felt the pain once more, this time, he lost control of himself and collapsed into some nearby bushes - yet when his body guards apprehended the assassin, Khattab ordered that they release him. Sadly, by then the poison had taken hold of Khattab and a few moments later, he breathed his last.

Khattab lived an exemplary life of sacrifice and pursued a just struggle against oppression. He lived a life larger than dreams and left behind him a legacy that will not be washed away by tears nor swept away by the tides of lies aimed at effacing his legacy.

Yes indeed, Khattab did not meet death on the battlefield, but let no man claim that death haunted or hunted Khattab. No - let them know, that it was Khattab who chased and confronted death wherever he found injustice, subjugation and humiliation within the Ummah of Muhammad (Salallahu 'aleihi wa Sallam).

May Allah send his Angels to escort Khattab to the highest ranks in Paradise and grant him the eternal company of the Prophets, Angels and true Servants of Truth.

SHEIKH ABDEL-HAMID KISHK (1933–1996)

I STILL REMEMBER

THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

Arguably one of the most eloquent and articulate of orators and scholars in the Arabic language popularised in the late 20th century, a man whose voice captured the collective sentiments of a billion believing hearts, a voice that expressed their grievances in the most captivating and charismatic modes of elegance and poetic speech.

This is the remarkable story of how the courage and determination of an ordinary child helped him overcome the hurdles of physical disability and empowered him to transcend the heights and limits of brilliance in his passionate pursuit of justice, truth and equality.

Abdel-Hamid Kishk, an ordinary child who would grow up to live an extraordinary life, was born in a modest village near the Egyptian city of Alexandria in the year 1933.

He was born within a decade since the last Muslim ruler under the Ottoman Caliphate was forcefully dismissed following the abolition of the Islamic ruling system that had previously governed the Muslim world - undisrupted for over fourteen hundred years.

OUT OF SIGHT

The young Abdel-Hamid was fortunate to have been in the presence of his father during his infancy however this paternal bond would be severed while he was still very young in age, when his father passed away, making the young Abdel-Hamid an orphan.

The death of his father would undoubtedly have had a noticeable impact in the life of the child but his difficulties were soon to take on new dimensions in hardship and adversity.

Barely in his early teens, the orphan began to suffer from a medical condition that gradually took away his sight in one eye and soon deprived him of his vision altogether.

The sudden affliction of blindness and the restrictive nature of his visual incapacity could have sufficed and served as the perfect excuse to give up on life and to surrender to the pessimistic tendencies that come so easily to most people during times of tribulation and hardship, yet in the life of Abdel-Hamid Kishk, such hurdles proved to be agents of positive change and catalysts for his advancement and eventual growth.

His visual impairment became a motivation rather than an impediment, it enabled and empowered him to reach targets that many of his peers could not even have perceived. His early losses and afflictions stirred -



- in him the spirit of determination and purpose and infused in his heart the ardent desire to excel in his studies, despite being visually impaired.

VISIONS OF GREATNESS

The young orphan was enrolled into a local elementary school wherein he completed his memorization and study of the Glorious Quran by the tender age of ten. Soon after graduating from elementary school the prodigious child was accepted into a religious seminary in Alexandria and by the second year of his course he was already being awarded perfect grades in his examinations.

His academic abilities singled him out from the other students and he was recognized for his hard work and piercing intelligence. At the end of his secondary education at the school, the young Abdel-Hamid was ranked first in the national league of examination boards and was subsequently accepted to study at the faculty of theology at the prestigious university of Al-Azhar in Cairo.

BREAKTHROUGH AND FORMATION

Abdel-Hamid Kishk was not the average student. He achieved more than his peers and faced many challenges during his academic pursuits. His experience at the university of Al-Azhar granted him the training and religious formation that would transform him into a world class scholar and orator in years to come.

Soon after Abdel-Hamid Kishk completed his graduate studies at the university of Al-Azhar's faculty of *Usoul al Din* (foundations of faith), he was granted the leadership and Imamate of a local mosque wherein he would be responsible for delivering weekly sermons and leading the prayers.

A few years later, in 1957, Sheikh Abdel-Hamid Kishk returned to the University of Al-Azhar as a lecturer in the faculty of theology, a position that came with much authority and recognition in the scholarly circles of Egypt.

But perhaps his most significant appointment came in the year 1964 when Sheikh Abdel-Hamid Kishk was elected to deliver religious sermons at the 'Ain al-Hayat masjid situated in Cairo, he would continue to occupy this post for several decades.

THE GOLDEN PULPIT

Sheikh Al Khateeb Abdel-Hamid Kishk was a graduate of Al-Azhar university and received his religious instructions in the classical tradition. He was skilled in the fields of Arabic poetry, grammar, morphology and rhetoric – for which he became famous, he was also a qualified scholar of religious law and a memorizer of the Glorious Quran.

Yet despite his high attainments and scholarly accolades, Sheikh Abdel-Hamid Kishk endeared and mesmerized his congregation by adorning his speech with classical Arabic but anchoring the message with colloquial euphemisms and idiosyncratic expressions that the laity could understand and appreciate.

His tapes and recordings were widely circulated and the listeners hung onto every word he uttered with a sense of deep curiosity and genuine interest in what he conveyed of the Quranic message and the Prophetic teachings.

Perhaps what made him even dearer to the generality and drew them closer to his lectures was his witty

command of language and his sharp sense of humor, it is said that Sheikh Abdel-Hamid Kishk had an unusual ability to humor his congregation but then draw them to bitter tears while delivering sermons on a single topic.

His recorded lectures were copied and broadcast from Cairo to Casablanca, his words reached listeners from the heart of Madinah to the streets of Marseilles.

In fact, so captivating and unique was his style and so charismatic was his delivery that a Saudi-funded magazine once described him as “*the star of Islamic preaching*”, the title did not fall short of merit as it was generally acknowledged that few speakers possessed the oratory command of classical and contemporary language the way he had, he also possessed the powerful gift of vocal versatility that enable him to animate his words with an almost poetic and rhythmic mode of delivery.

It is not an exaggeration to claim that the Sheikh's panoramic grasp of Islamic and Arab culture coupled with his phenomenal ability to improvise and respond to critics and opponents on the spot made him a rare sight indeed.

His subject matter was also different from the norm, he would inject a healthy dose of reality into his sermons by openly addressing the oppressive nature of the socialist regimes, the tyranny of Arab military dictatorships and the peace treaty signed with Israel, he even objected openly to the complicity of al-Azhar on some of these injustices.

So tremendous were his sermons that he frequently drew crowds numbering up to ten thousand on a weekly basis, and as his popularity and influence extended to the surrounding cities and beyond the Egyptian borders - towards the early 1980s the Ministry of endowments was obliged to extend the mosque's facilities in order to accommodate the growing numbers that would flock to attend his weekly Friday sermons.

I WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER

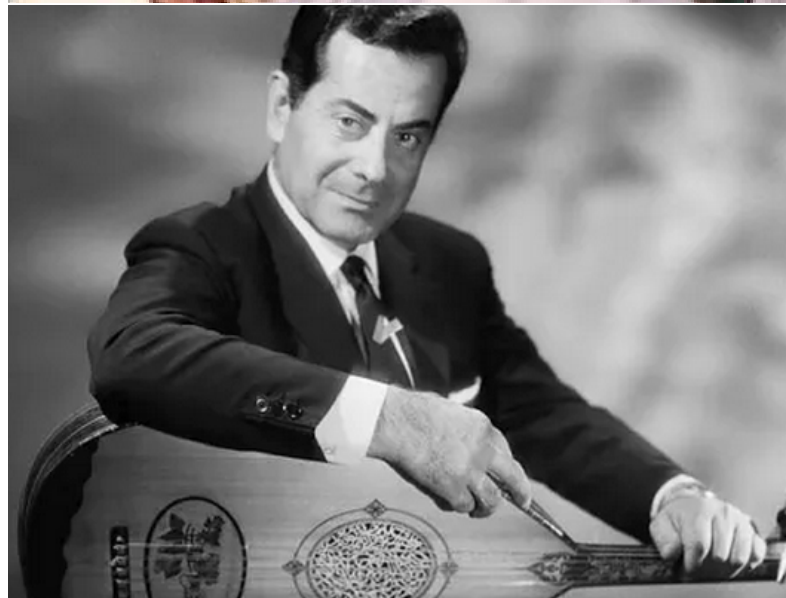
But as his profile began to be more and more public, Sheikh Abdel-Hamid Kishk drew more unwanted attention from the secret services.

He was a vocal and unapologetic critic of the Egyptian government – his stance concerning the imprisonment of several clerics and Islamic activists had landed him in trouble with the authority and he was convicted in 1965, subsequently serving two and a half years in jail - during which he was subjected to repeated torture and unspeakable cruelty.

But not long after his release from prison towards the early 1970's, Sheikh Abdel-Hamid Kishk began to intensify his sermons by fearlessly addressing the injustice, moral decadence and increasingly anti-Islamic legislation that was fast enveloping Egyptian society.

Sheikh Abdul-Hamid Kishk was an outspoken and courageous critic of popular Arab musicians, he was not afraid to remind the elite that Islam prohibited music and its associated lifestyle, this was especially bold at a time when musical royalty such as Umm Kuthum, Muhammad Abdel Wahhab and Fayruz were at their peak and western dress was becoming more and more encouraged in Egypt.

Sheikh Abdel-Hamid Kishk was also critical of the oppressive laws and legislations that were disproportionately directed towards Muslim activists, lecturers and ideologues - he spoke out in defense of many political prisoners and openly supported the right for Muslims to defend and uphold their religious identity by growing the beard and wearing the headscarf in public.



But by the year 1976 Abdel-Hamid Kishk was becoming a serious obstacle for the authorities, his direct and brazen honesty in the face of power only made him more and more feared and detested by the political class.

This became more of a problem following president Anwar Sadat's involvement at the Camp David peace treaty with Israel. Criticism and angry responses from many Islamic organizations resulted in president Anwar Al-Sadat's orders for the mass imprisonment of several scholars and orators during the famous *September resolutions*. Sheikh Abdul-Hamid Kishk was one of the key personalities targeted during this crackdown operation.

As the confrontation grew more serious and more attention was being paid to the Sheikh, he was arrested and apprehended a few more times by the authorities and in the year 1981 shortly before president Anwar Sadat's assassination, Sheikh Abdel-Hamid Kishk was arrested once more.

He was eventually granted his freedom during the presidential rule of Hosni Mubarak - under the strict condition that he discontinued his public speaking engagements. Sadly, following his release from prison in 1982 the Sheikh did not return to his mosque to deliver any more sermons.



THE ALCHEMY OF WORDS

During his tenure at the 'Ain al-Hayat mosque, Sheikh Abdel-Hamid Kishk openly lamented the social conditions in Egypt which were exacerbated by the crackdown directed towards Islamic movements. However the underlying current to his narrative was distinctly spiritual and sprung forth from a traditional Islamic orthodoxy, a recurring theme that colors all of his speeches.

Unlike a number of scholars and many of his contemporaries who were figures of religious authority, Sheikh Abdel-Hamid Kishk was not a conformist to the dominant forces of president Gamal Abdel Nasser and then throughout the presidency of Anwar Sadat, the Sheikh was defiantly pro-Islam and anti-Socialist. He was a conscientious moral dissident under the brutal Socialist regime that took hold of Egypt in his day.

This resulted in a total media boycott during the rule of president Anwar Sadat between 1970 and 1981, however the sheikh's mass appeal and informal distribution network facilitated the continual exchange of recordings and cassettes within Egypt and beyond its borders. However, some of his critics are gravely mistaken in characterizing Abdel-Hamid Kishk as a political figurehead – this could not be farther from the reality.

Though the Sheikh did espouse strong opposing views in light of the Socialist bureaucratic state that existed in his time, he was far more involved in discussing the central role of spiritual excellence and personal piety in many of his speeches, the cultivation of the inner configurations of human virtues was as important if not more urgent than the political externalities that resulted from the fruits of man's corrupt spirituality.

It was in light of this more profound and meaningful struggle that the Sheikh framed his discourse around the concept of a '*Greater Jihad*'. According to his interpretation, Jihad is a continual struggle aimed at subduing one's base nature and working to cultivate the soul so that it can be cultivated to embody the highest moral standards.

Criticism of the self and the cultivation of virtuous traits such as honesty, justice, kindness and patience form the basis for a type of personal development that would result in creating pious and philanthropic activism, promoting justice and prosperity in society while combating ignorance, injustice and oppression.

THE FINAL PROSTRATION

Sheikh Abdel-Hamid Kishk was a courageous and selfless champion of the common people, much of his life was given to learning and teaching others – though he spent a significant portion of his life under the oppressive and watchful surveillance of the authorities and eventually served a number of years in jail, he was still loved and deeply admired by the people and continued to inspire hope and optimism in the hearts of a believing nation.

But as his final day dawned upon him, during the last hour of his eventful life, Sheikh Abdel-Hamid Kishk prepared himself for the Friday prayers by performing his ritual ablutions at home before turning his back to the world and heading towards the mosque.

He entered the gathering and stood up to perform two light units of prayer, it was during the second rakat that he went down into prostration and drew closer to his Creator. He never raised his head again, Abdul-Hamid Kishk died on Friday 26th of July 1996, the angel of death claimed his soul while he was in prostration to Allah.



Sheikh Abdel-Hamid Kishk delivered his legendary lectures for over 40 years in his evocative and eloquent style of preaching, his command of the Arabic vernacular was unmatched and his passionate sermons electrified his audiences.

He was able to induce tears and possessed the gifted ability to animate large audiences with uncontrollable laughter while openly addressing the daily hardship that visited the average citizen. The public loved him, scholars respected him and the tyrants feared him.

Al Sheikh Al Khateeb Abdel-Hamid Kishk spoke the language of scholars but transmitted his wisdom to the masses in the universal language of Courage, Empathy and Friendship.

May his eyes be awakened to the heavenly sights of Jannatul Firdaws, Ameen.

SHEIKH HASSAN MUHAMMED AL-BANNA (1906–1949)

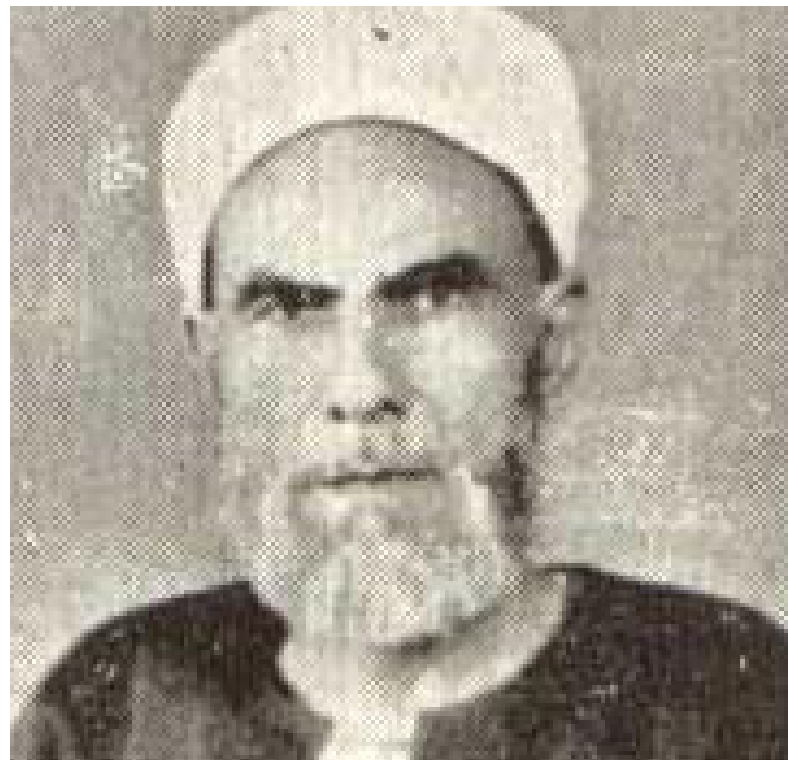
THE BROTHERHOOD

MAHMUDIYYA

Hasan Ahmed Abdel Rahman Muhammed al-Banna was born into a pious and middle class Egyptian family on October the 14th 1906, his family lived in the town of Mahmudiyya, situated in the North-Western region of Cairo – it was formerly a town that was famous for being one of the most important trade ports on the Nile river.

FATHER TO SON

Hasan Al Banna was the son of an erudite and well respected Islamic scholar and local Imam, teacher and author. Shaykh Ahmad Abd al-Rahman al-Banna al-Sa'ati was the author of a book entitled “*Musnad al-fath al-Rabbani*”, this was a classification of prophetic traditions from the classical collection of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal.



EDUCATION AND FORMATION

The young Hassan Al Banna grew up in a time of social upheaval in Egypt, while in his early teenage years, the young lad lived to experience his country being revolutionized in the year 1919. The electric atmosphere charged the hearts and minds of young Egyptians growing up in the era of anti-colonial sentiment as Egyptians of all walks of life took to the streets to rid themselves of British rule.

In this milieu of activism and social engagement, the young Hassan Al Banna was initiated into the realms of political activism and social reconstruction.

Despite his youth and inexperience in the field of social activism and his lack of political experience, the young Hassan Al Banna immersed himself into the spirit of the age, what some call the *Zeitgeist*. He would proceed by writing articles, publishing them via his very own pamphlets – in fact, so active was the budding intellect that he soon founded and directed an independent organisation for social reform, which was targeted at his peers.

Hassan Al Banna hailed from a property owning middle class family that was headed by his father, a man who commanded a respectable degree of consideration for his central role as Imam and teacher within the local community – he also worked as a watch repairer in the village.

Nevertheless, during Hassan Al-Banna's teenage years, in the early 1920's, Egypt suffered a crippling economic crisis that sent middle class and working class families into financial hardship, families such as the Al-Bannas were eventually left with little choice but to sell their property in order to sustain a minimal standard of existence during the financial crisis.

Driven out by the high costs of living and the unstable markets, the family relocated from Mahmudiyya and settled in Cairo – the year was 1924. However, if there was one tenet of their middle class lifestyle that the family were not going to surrender, it was the commodity of a decent and wholesome education. Hassan and his brother Gamal were not to be deprived of good schooling.

Sheikh Ahmad Al Banna had worked hard to instill and cultivate the importance of education and learning in the very minds of his young sons, in fact – when not studying in the local seminary, Hassan Al Banna benefitted from the private tutorship of his father and memorized the Quran at an early age. By 1923 the young student was enrolled in a teacher's training Academy in Cairo.

Quite unexpectedly, Hassan Al Banna – now a teacher in training did not initially get his father's approval, this was born of the fact that Hassan had chosen to study modern and secular subjects at the academy and not the traditional Islamic curriculum, as was desired by his father.

Not long thereafter, Hassan Al Banna was accepted into university owing to his intelligence and studious merits. Yet despite the scholastic divide between father and son, Hassan Al Banna continued to participate in Islamic societies and organizations during his academic career.

It was his father's associates and comrades that helped Hassan Al Banna get some degree of acceptance and recognition initially, however – once initiated, he stood on his own two feet and earned the respect and admiration of fellow members by virtue of his hard work, dedication and commitment to the Islamic cause – he even successfully published 15 articles for the a leading Islamic journal.

By the year 1927, Hassan Al Banna graduated and took residence in the region of Ismail-iliyyia where at the age of twenty one, he became a primary school teacher.



THE PLEDGE

Dissatisfied and discomfited with the growing social and cultural invasion, mainly driven by a push to resemble the occidental nations and societies of the day. Hassan Al Banna was amongst the rising voices airing concern and discontent at the Western influenced leadership and the apathetic approach to traditional societal norms and religion tradition.

The tension mounted and by March 1928, Hassan Al Banna and six locals met and decided to take a pledge to serve Islam in life and in death. The men were Hafez Abdel-Hamid, Ahmad Al-Hossary, Fuad Ibrahim, Abder-Rahman Hasab-Allah, Ismael Ezz and Zaki Al-Maghraby.

This small group of brothers were to become the foundation of a much larger organisation, later to be known as the *Ikhwanul Muslimeen* (the Muslim Brotherhood). While working in Ismaili-yyah, Hassan Al-Banna and the newly formed group of brothers also established another group caled “*The Muslim Mothers Institute*” which was established to promote literacy and education amongst women in the village.

Though initially, the group was primarily an informal set of individuals who would meet to discuss and remind one another of the spiritual and individual dimensions of personal piety, they would also participate and promote the institution of charity

ACTIVISM AND REFORM

Sheikh Hassan Al-Banna dreamt of an Egypt free of Secularism and Western imperialism, one of his missions with the Muslim Brotherhood was to reclaim Egypt’s sovereignty and independence from the British colonial administration and to restore the Islamic Caliphate – by which all Muslims could live in congruence with their faith, in peace.

The method he employed towards realizing this overarching objective was to build and strengthen society through the establishment of key institutions and resources for the impoverished and deprived communities. In fact, so effective were the means and strategies of the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt that the British colonial infrastructure recognized the brilliance and potential of the movement, they subsequently invited Hassan Al-Banna to their embassy for an unofficial negotiation proposal over cups of tea.

Throughout the meeting with the British, Hassan Al-Banna was praised and commended for his motivation, vision and moral integrity. The achievements of the Muslim Brotherhood were recognized and applauded by the British who noted the fact that the movement under Hassan Al-Banna’s leadership had established many shelters for orphans, built schools and maintained vital community centers.

However, the real motive behind such kind hearted pleasantries and transparent lack of sincerity was the fact that Britain needed a strong grass roots organisation to help them repress the popular nationalist calls for independence, they were also under huge pressure from the demands of funding and supporting the war in Europe – but they tried to convince Hassan Al-Banna that it was in fact the Egyptians that were in dire and desperate need of assistance from the British.

and mutual assistance. However, within five years the direction and dimensions of the group had grown and developed into a more organized and more politically engaged effort – by the 1930’s the Muslim Brotherhood were operating between thirty to fifty branches, extending to many of the major Egyptian provinces and regions.

During the early days, Sheikh Hassan Al-Banna would deliver sermons and lectures in the local community centers and engaged in lengthy dialogue with both the intellectuals and the laity at local coffee shops and places of gathering, he did however – avoid conflict with the religious establishment for fear of animosity and unwarranted controversy.

Hassan Al Banna’s charismatic and impassioned narrative would inspire and mobilize over five hundred thousand members and over three million supporters in Egypt by the 1930s, eventually the movement extended its reach far beyond the Egyptian territory.

This phenomenal growth was demonstrable by the fact that Hassan Al Banna relocated the group’s headquarters from Ismaili-yyah to Cairo in 1932.

Upon hearing and listening to the proposal extended by the British, Hassan Al-Banna responded by refusing to cooperate with the colonial administration and promptly reminded them that Egypt and its wealth belong to the Egyptian people. Soon thereafter, Hassan Al-Banna was exiled to Upper Egypt in 1948.

RECRUITMENT DRIVE

The Muslim Brotherhood quickly gained popularity through a well-organized structure with military, political and social services.

They reached out to like-minded organizations and leaders from other Muslim countries and engaged fully in the grass roots effort to revive Islam and real-ize once more, the honor and true legacy of the Faith.

The Muslim Brotherhood earned the respect and admiration of the masses by providing much needed facilities such as schools, hospitals and community amenities that would have direct positive impact on the lives of locals, but perhaps more importantly Hassan Al Banna reached out to the educated middle class, the teachers, accountants, middle management and doctors who had the benefit of a modern education. Many of them responded to the Muslim Brotherhood's call for social and moral reform in Egypt.



POPULARIZING THE PALESTINE CAUSE

Though his movement was established on the desire to see an independent Egypt and self-determined rule according to native traditions rooted in Islam. Hassan Al Banna was not a nationalist and his concerns were not only limited to Egypt.

During the 1930's as the Palestinian cause became an even greater thorn in the side of many governments and political establishments, the Muslim Brotherhood's involvement in the rally to support and promote the Palestinian movement was significant and timely.

Between 1936 and 1939 the Muslim Brotherhood provided the momentum behind a formidable effort to publicize and popularize the Arab Palestinian Revolt by organizing prayers, raising emergency funds from villages and small townships, distributing literature concerning the Palestinian struggle and even organizing political rallies in the streets of Egypt.

The Muslim Brotherhood's endorsement and support of the Palestinian cause contributed significantly towards the worldwide awareness and awakened sensitivity to the urgency and legitimacy of the Palestinian cry for help – in fact during the 1948 Arab Israeli war, the Muslim Brotherhood participated in the armed struggle by sending helpers to assist the Arab forces on the front lines, yet despite the unprecedented success and the mass movement popularizing the Palestinian cause across the middle-east and beyond, the campaign was eventually suppressed by the brutal agency of military intrusion.

THE ASSASSINATION

By the year 1948, Hassan Al-Banna and the Muslim brotherhood had occupied such a significant platform within the Egyptian political and social spectrum that rumors were rampant about the brotherhood's plans to seize governance of Egypt by means of a coup-d'état.

The prime minister of the time, Mahmud al-Nukrashi Pasha grew very wary and discomforted by the influence and political clout at the disposal of the movement, it was this mélange of fear and hatred for the Muslim Brotherhood that would motivate the prime minister to order a total ban on the movement.

Although Sheikh Hassan Al-Banna had not issued any directives or calls to take up arms against the government or to seek retribution against the prime minister, it was only three weeks following the new legislation that a major calamity struck Egypt.

Abdel Maguid Ahmed Hassan, a veterinary student at the University of King Fouad was the man behind a foolish and fatal assassination plot.

The student, who had disguised himself as a lieutenant and positioned himself in the building of the Ministry of Interior, had targeted and shot prime minister Mahmud al-Nukrashi at close range, fatally wounding him with two bullets.

The prime minister of Egypt was pronounced dead at 10am on the 28th of December 1948, but in what would color the narrative for the Muslim Brotherhood's future in Egypt was to be reported nationally as the fact that Abdel Maguid, the man who killed Egypt's prime minister – was in fact an



active member of the Muslim Brotherhood and he had claimed responsibility for the act as well as claiming to have assassinated the prime minister as an act of retaliation and revenge for the ban on the organisation less than a month earlier.

The news was devastating and totally unexpected for the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan Al-Banna delivered a swift and categorical statement of condemnation for the murderous and callous act of the assassin, who had claimed to be acting on behalf of the organisation while the group expressed in no uncertain terms that the act of murder was not Islamic or defensible – yet soon after the news had settled in the Egyptian society, the populist tides of public support and approval that had once legitimized and galvanized the Muslim brotherhood had suddenly turned against them.

Now members of the Muslim Brotherhood feared for the furious and bloody reprisals soon to come.

It was on the 12th of February, 1949 – that Hassan Al-Banna left a meeting with one of the government's ministers that had been inconveniently cancelled at the last moment. Accompanied by his brother-in-law, Abdul-Karim Mansur, the twain stood outside the building at approximately 5pm as they awaited the arrival of a taxi – tragically, it was on that fateful day at that precise hour that the anticipated reprisal was carried out against the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Hassan Al-Banna was gunned down in broad daylight – the assassins were unidentified and to this day, no one has ever been brought to justice for the murder.



Soon after the incident, Hassan Al-Banna was rushed off to the hospital for emergency treatment however he died of excessive bleeding while lying on the floor unattended for almost two hours after the fatal shooting. He died soon thereafter, he was only forty three years of age.

Hassan Al-Banna's untimely death has been associated by many, with a government plot against the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood. Attendance at his funeral was publicly banned by the Egyptian government – only few of his family members including his father, brother and some women were allowed to carry his body to his final resting place.

Hassan Al-Banna's vision for a sovereign and independent Muslim nation has awakened a much needed effort within the Muslim Ummah to live and die for the Faith and to build communities and strengthen societies through positive and constructive institutions and facilities. His life example serves as a reminder for all Muslim men, women and children of the importance of hard work, determination and sincerity.

May Allah grant Sheikh Hassan Al-Banna a high and lofty rank in Paradise and compensate him for his sacrifice on behalf of the Muslim Ummah.



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